Dagmara Gałajda

Group cohesiveness

Abstract: The aim of this chapter is to discuss the notion of group cohesiveness in the context of a language classroom. Also, the chapter focuses on the importance of different stages of group development in creating a positive classroom climate. The models of group formation and development by Tuckman and Jensen (1977) and Dörnyei and Ehrman's (1998) are accompanied by the techniques of facilitating group dynamics (Hadfield, 1992; Jaques, 2000; Levi, 2010; Haynes, 2012). The next section contains a description of a teacher as the group leader and the facilitator of group processes. Finally, the last section concerning factors which influence group cohesiveness deals with the potential conflicts which might be an obstacle in the way of a cohesive classroom. Before the factors influencing group cohesiveness are presented and discussed, the chapter explores language classroom from the perspective of a social group, followed by the definition of group cohesiveness. The chapter concludes with some implications for classroom practitioners and suggestions for the development of a cohesive language classroom.

Keywords: group cohesiveness, classroom climate, facilitation, group dynamics

1. Introduction

Positive group climate and cohesiveness are major aims of facilitating group dynamics. In order to create a cohesive group with a stable structure and without cliques the teacher should realize that language classroom is a social group. When the teacher becomes aware of group processes taking place in the class he/she is able to diagnose at which stage of group development the students are (Haynes, 2012). Next, he/she can enhance the classroom climate by specially designed activities, and make the students aware of what happens inside their group. Being not only the controller of the group, but also the group leader and facilitator means the teacher is able to create a cohesive group. Although it is

not very difficult to maintain a positive classroom climate once group cohesiveness is reached, the group may face some conflicts (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) which should be dealt with. However difficult it might seem, an effort to create group cohesiveness is worth trying as it has been proved that cohesive groups are usually more successful, effective, and productive (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Levi, 2010; Haynes, 2012). Inter-member relations and task-orientation are two aspects of group life which should be promoted so as to reach group cohesiveness. People enjoy cooperating and spending time together when they share the same goals, attitudes towards the learning process and when the group atmosphere is welcoming and accepting. In other words, when the group they are in is a cohesive one.

2. Language classroom as a social group

Szacka quotes (2003, p. 184) a general term of a "social group" provided by Ossowski (1967), which she sees as the most universal and satisfactory one. As stated by Ossowski, a group is every assembly of people, which can be perceived as an entity with respect to any noteworthy relations occurring among its members. Szacka also claims that in everyday life people tend to overuse the word "group"; for example, when they talk about people standing in a queue. Szacka argues there is a difference between an assembly of random people and a social group since the latter has its mutual goal and interaction can be observed between group members.

As Szacka (2003) suggests, there are three main structures (sociometric, leadership, and communication) that exist within a group. Generally speaking, sociometrics deals with mutual interactions among group members. The research results concerning sociometrics are based on a simple questionnaire: people are asked who they would like to work with. Such results may show the interpersonal relations within a group, its cohesiveness, dynamics, division of roles, and hierarchy. Looking at leadership structure Szacka (2003) suggests that a group leader has some personal features, however, they are not universal for all situations. It is the group that makes a given person a group leader, which means that people who are in charge in one situation usually stand aside in a different one. Another dimension of group leadership structure mentioned by Szacka (2003) is that there are two kinds of leader roles. The first one concentrates on completing the task, whereas the second prevents conflict and creates a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere. The main aim of the research focused on the communication structure of a group is how communication among group members affects group functioning as such.

Taking into consideration the characteristics of a social group and its structure, the question is whether language classes are types of a social group. Mika (1998) maintains that language classes are the same social units as other groups and they can be more or less cohesive. All students interact since they spend a few hours together in one place. What is more, a group has a great influence on its members and creates their system of values, norms, and codes of behavior. The learning process always takes place in groups (except for one-to-one teaching), which makes the students conscious of belonging to a particular community. Being in the same class with a group of people and completing tasks and achieving goals is the basis for having a sense of identity. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) also support Mika's view by saying that language learners interact while learning, identify with other members of the group and influence the life of the group by sharing the same goal, namely to learn a language. The authors also add that "a group qualifies as a 'group' when it has become a psychological reality for insiders and outsiders alike" (2003, p. 13), which is also true in the case of the foreign language classroom.

Since the whole internal group structure is based on students' and teachers' behavior together with interaction among them (Forsyth, 2009), it can be said that the classroom is a social system. What is more, the influence that all group members have on the group creates classroom climate and group processes. That is the reason why, both group members' behavior and interactional patterns that take place in a group, contribute to successful classroom dynamics and group cohesiveness (2009).

It seems that classroom environment has many different dimensions which create group structure. What is more, various group processes which occur in group life, influence classroom interaction and learners themselves. Therefore, by being aware and open to control group processes, the teacher becomes a facilitator of group dynamics who can easily help learners to achieve their personal and mutual goals, as well as to create a cohesive group.

3. Defining group cohesiveness

In the course of their life some groups disintegrate very fast while some others grow stronger. Some group members are more focused on their individual goals while some others concentrate on group goals. The more the learners are involved in group life, the more cohesive the group is. However easy it is to say which groups are cohesive and which are not, the concept of group cohesiveness itself is not easy to be defined. Forsyth (2009, p. 118) calls cohesiveness "a multicomponent process with a variety of indicators." He claims that there are

a number of characteristics like "attraction among group members, attraction to the group as a whole" (2009, p. 118), strong sense of belonging, unwillingness to leave the group, "tendency to stick together, trust, and teamwork" (2009) which are core components of the concept of cohesiveness.

In the 1940s and 1950s the research on group cohesiveness focused on the forces that keep people together or apart, as well as on attraction as the most important of these forces (Lewin, 1943; Festinger et al., 1950).

> […] group members may be bonded to their groups in a number of ways. At the individual level, specific group members are attracted to other group members. […] At the group level, members are attracted to the group itself rather than specific individuals in the group. These various levels of attraction usually co-vary; for example, friendship among the members of a group tends to generate liking for and pride in the group as a whole. (Forsyth, 2009, p. 119)

From such a social perspective group cohesiveness can be defined as the combination of attraction on both individual and group level. It means that group members enjoy spending time together, cooperating and achieving the same goals, and also they like the group as the organization itself with all its norms and values. What also keeps group members together is task cohesion which can be described as a general willingness to work as a team. Group members are more likely to identify with the group and perceive it as part of their life when they enjoy cooperating in order to reach group and individual goals (Smith et al., 2007). Also, group members who have positive emotions about others in the group are more likely to create a cohesive team. Despite being rather an individual feature, emotions can also be collective, especially when they are positive. Cohesive groups with which members strongly identify are more willing to share the same feelings and consequently become more emphatic (Spoor & Kelly, 2004). All in all, emotional cohesiveness makes group members excited about just being part of the group and thus motivated to work together towards a common goal.

Among many factors influencing group cohesiveness the most important, from the sociological perspective, seem to be group membership, size, and structure (Forsyth, 2009). Those groups which are difficult to access and which have high requirements are usually more valued by group members and because of that group members usually strongly identify with it, which leads to group cohesiveness.

> Initiations […] contribute to a group's cohesion by strengthening the bond between individual and the group. Groups with initiation policies may also be more attractive to members, since their exclusiveness may make them

> seem more prestigious. Since membership must be earned, people who join do so more intentionally, and therefore will more likely be active, contributing members. (Forsyth, 2009, pp. 125–126)

When groups increase in size, group members lose opportunities to cooperate with everybody and the relationships disappear with time. Additionally, it is impossible for all group members in a relatively big group to take part in all tasks, which may result in a lack of sense of belonging to a group. The structure of the group with potential subgroups can also be more or less conducive for the creation of group cohesiveness. By definition, more structured groups are more cohesive, as the group members know the norms and rules; there is a leader who organizes, facilitates, and controls group work and everyone in the group knows his/her role (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 2002). Getting the members acquainted with group structure is of high importance as people should know and be aware of what to expect and how to behave in a group. Apart from the already enumerated factors influencing group cohesiveness there are others such as the stages of group development, the teacher as a leader, manager, and facilitator of group processes and conflicts. These factors will be discussed in greater detail later in this article.

4. Group development over time

Groups which exist over a longer period of time go through different phases of group development. Despite the fact that theoreticians use different taxonomy in their models, throughout all stages of group development there are certain changes concerning group structure, intermember relations, the role of the leader and of all group members (Haynes, 2012). Additionally,

> [a]s groups progress through their stages, group members undergo commensurate social, psychological, emotional and cognitive changes. The values of groups become more salient to the individual and the factors of groups that promote change begin to make a difference. (Haynes, 2012, p. 8)

Haynes (2012) emphasizes that group development does not only exist on the group level but it also affects individual members of the group. Group processes influence individual group members and so does each and every person in the group. In the context of a language classroom successful facilitation of group dynamics and, consequently, creating cohesive group can have a positive

influence on both the whole learning process and the individuals who become more effective in achieving their personal goals. All in all, successful and effective learning groups create more productive students and vice versa. However, it might only happen in groups which are facilitated according to the stage of group development.

As has been already mentioned, there are different taxonomies concerning group development. Nevertheless, almost all of them agree that there are four or five stages of group life depending on whether we include the final phase in the life of a group, namely, dissolution. The model by Tuckman and Jensen (1977) includes five stages. The initial stage of group development called forming is the time when group members are looking for meaning, and they are reluctant to participate in group life as they do not feel safe. At this stage group members learn how to work together, carry out given tasks, and interact. At the very beginning of group life many members do not want to express their opinions openly. However, the situation changes with time and at the next stage—namely storming—conflicts and disagreements might occur. What follows the storming stage is the norming phase. Finally, group members are able to cooperate and the role of the teacher is no longer focused on showing the right path towards the goal but rather controlling and supervising the learners' actions. The stage at which groups work most effectively is the performing stage. At this stage groups are mature, task-oriented and everyone knows his/her role in the group. The students cooperate with each other naturally and they can easily agree on the same solutions. The final stage of group development is the adjourning stage when the life of the group finishes or it is suspended for some time.

Despite the fact that facilitating group dynamics has separate goals at every stage, the major aim of facilitation in general is creating a cohesive group. That is the reason why teachers should always realize their short-term goals assigned for a given stage so as to achieve the long-term goal of group cohesiveness. For example, at the formation (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) stage, also called induction (Kottler, 2001) stage, the role of the teacher as a group leader is to focus on the individual needs of the learners and make them more open towards others. In the context of language learning it might be even more difficult as group members are supposed to communicate in a foreign language which they might not know very well. Since group members lack confidence they constantly need teacher's guidance. He/she should concentrate on every individual and show them how to contribute to group life. It is an extremely important stage in the case of language classrooms as students learn for the first time the most crucial aspect of the language learning process—namely, communication. Levi (2010) stresses the importance of group beginnings by saying that the formation stage shapes the future life of the group. He claims that at the initial stage of group development members socialize, they decide on a mutual group goal and set up rules and norms governing the life of the group.

After the formation stage (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) come the stage of transition (Corey & Corey, 1997) and of conflict, dominance, and rebellion (Yalom, 1995). After some time learners become more confident about their involvement in group life and probably their language proficiency has developed. All of this makes them feel more secure and sometimes dissatisfied with the behavior of other group members. In language classrooms some learners acquire knowledge faster than others, some develop productive skills while some others are better at listening and reading. Such discrepancies in proficiency levels might lead to anxiety and general dissatisfaction. Group members are still unable to see that they can benefit from other learners in a group and that achieving a mutual goal is profitable for everybody. Such negative forms of group dynamics are also necessary and help to see problems from different perspectives. With the teacher's help learners can solve all major problems, reach consensus, and get closer to creating a cohesive group.

The next stage is the most desired by all facilitators—the stage of cohesive engagement (Kottler, 2001) and trust (Wheelan, 1994). Corey and Corey (1997) call this phase "Working," which is an accurate metaphor of what happens inside the group. Students begin to strongly believe in their mutual goal. They can easily organize their work due to established rules and norms. Of course, no matter how cohesive the group is at that stage, some conflicts might still occur. Nonetheless, the students are able to solve their problems in a constructive way. During the learning process it might happen that some students finish the task earlier than others. The role of the teacher is to provide them with additional activities, but it is also good when students can solve this problem themselves; for example, by helping those who have not completed the task yet. It usually happens that at this stage students do it without the teacher's signal as in a cohesive group at the norming phase it is natural to cooperate.

The final stage in the major of models of group development is the performing phase (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). The role of the teacher seems to be limited here; however, it is not true as the teacher-facilitator is still responsible for controlling and supervising group processes.

> The more 'mature' a group, the more likely the group will spend the bulk of its time working rather than socializing, seeking direction or arguing. […] Groups that have been together longer talk more about work-related matters, whereas younger groups are more likely to express conflict or uncertainty and make requests for guidance. (Forsyth, 2009, p. 132)

It is highly possible that due to longer experience groups at the performing stage need less supervision on the side of the teacher as they are able to take care of themselves and even sometimes of others in the group. That is the reason why teachers can observe students' willingness towards working in pairs and small

groups, taking part in projects, discussions or even competitions. What is also interesting at this stage is that despite strong group cohesiveness it sometimes happens that the teacher is excluded from the group since one of the students becomes the new leader. In such overcohesive groups the role of the teacher diminishes, which is not beneficial for overall group productivity. In language classes such a situation is least desired as the teacher is definitely needed throughout the course of learning as a source of knowledge, language model, and supervisor. The second problem that might appear at this stage is that many groups never reach the phase of performance due to conflicts, lack of positive facilitation, and small motivation on the side of the learners. Such groups usually finish their life after reaching the norming stage at which they feel a kind of accomplishment, however, it is too short-lived to survive and develop.

Some of the authors emphasize the existence of one more stage—namely, adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) or termination (Wheelan, 1994) which finishes the life of the group. Taking this phase into consideration is extremely important in the case of language learning since almost all language learning groups suspend their classes during holidays or they simply finish the group experience after taking exams. Forsyth (2009) states that the stage of dissolution can be either planned or spontaneous. Groups which have not reached cohesiveness at the norming stage usually do not survive and finish their group experience. Usually the students become dissatisfied with group processes, teacher facilitation techniques or lack of any, the initial group goal has become unimportant to them, etc. Spontaneous dissolution is always some kind of a failure for a teacher, because it points to unsuccessful facilitation. No matter whether the termination stage was planned or not it is always stressful for both the teacher and students.

> […] the final group sessions may be filled with conflict-laden exchanges among members, growing apathy and animosity, or repeated failures at the group's task. Even when dissolution is planned, the members may feel distressed. Their work in the group may be over, but they still mourn for the group and suffer from a lack of personal support. (Forsyth, 2009, p. 134)

Hadfield (1992), as well as Dörnyei and Murphey (2003), stress the importance of finishing group life with positive feelings even when the dissolution stage has not been planned. The authors suggest implementing a series of activities which would enable the teacher to finish the group life more smoothly so that the learners can evaluate the past and formulate new goals for the future. The learners should also be given the opportunity to reflect upon what they have achieved and what they would like to work on. Learning a language is an ongoing process which hardly ever finishes. Because of that, even when group life finishes, it is

highly probable that group members will continue learning a language. That is the reason why it is advisable to appreciate the dissolution stage and sacrifice some time to it.

The theories described above focus on the changes in group processes which happen over time in a given order. Levi (2010) suggests that not all groups follow exactly the models suggested by the authors. Some groups skip stages while some other spend more time on a given phase. It means that they follow one model but in a cyclic order—they focus longer on some stages and avoid the others. An example of a cyclical model is the one by Bales and Cohen (1979, as cited in Forsyth, 2009). In their equilibrium model, the authors claim that group members all the time try to find the balance between achieving the mutual goal and trying to maintain positive relations with other people in the group. Such a model suits the context of language learning in a group facilitated by the teacher. On the one hand, the learners have one mutual goal, which is to learn the language. On the other hand, the teacher-facilitator is trying to create and maintain a positive classroom climate which partly stems from positive relations between group members. It can be stated that what lies behind group development from the perspective of cyclical theorists is also group cohesiveness, as group members not only strive for a mutual goal but also a positive classroom climate. The equilibrium model seems to be the most suitable for the context of a language classroom due to its flexibility. As mentioned before, groups learning a language cease to function for two, three months during a holiday season and next they reunite. Even after such a short period students need to build their group cohesiveness from the very beginning and, for example, deal with conflicts. In other words, language classrooms usually do not follow group development scheme stage by stage but rather cycle between them with the help of the teacher-facilitator.

5. The role of the teacher in creating group cohesiveness

There are groups which exist without official leaders, however, they seem to be less effective and less cohesive (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 2002) as the members are usually unable to control group processes, working towards the goal and taking care of a positive atmosphere in the group. In the case of language classrooms it is rather impossible for the group to function without the teacher taking into account the specificity of the learning process. Apart from being the controller, resource, observer, and assessor (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003), the teacher is also the leader who facilitates group processes and consequently creates group cohesiveness. There are certain management techniques concerning

group existence. If they are incorporated into group life at the forming stage it is highly possible that the group will be much more successful throughout its life (Levi, 2010). The general rule for creating an effective facilitation technique consists of setting up a goal, enabling cooperation among group members, and establishing rules and norms of this cooperation (Haynes, 2012). However, at the very beginning the teacher should consider what kind of leader he/she would like to be in general:

> Leadership is not the power to coerce others, an inborn trait, a necessity of group life, or a mysterious capacity to heal sick groups. Instead, leadership is the process by which an individual guides others in their collective pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting, and motivating their efforts. Leadership, then, is not a static characteristic of an individual or a group, but a complex of interpersonal processes whereby cooperating individuals are permitted to influence and motivate others to promote the attainment of group and individual goals. (Forsyth, 2009, p. 249)

Apart from these general characteristics described by Forsyth, there are various theories of leadership which all aim at group cohesiveness and productivity but by different means. It is up to the teacher to decide which form of teacher-leader-facilitator is the most suitable for the group and for the teacher himself/herself.

The oldest and most general model of leadership is the one by Lewin et al. (1939), in which three types of a leader are presented: authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic. This model of leadership is the basic one for less experienced teachers who would like to start creating their facilitation techniques. Novice teachers usually begin with authoritarian leadership so as to keep total control over the students. Unfortunately, this authoritarian style can destroy communication and interaction, and because of that it is not highly recommended for language classroom use. With time teachers can move from a strongly authoritarian leadership to a democratic style which is appreciated by students (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001) and useful in developing group cohesiveness. Students who take part in and decide about what happens inside of the group are more likely to create and maintain positive relations in their group.

In the situational-leadership theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) teachers can decide whether they want to focus on classroom relationships, goal completion, or the combination of these two. Consequently, the teacher can adjust his/her leadership techniques to the stage of group development. The authors suggest high-task and low-relationship leadership at the beginning of group life, next concentrating more on positive relations between group members and finally making the students responsible for group life and cohesiveness by low-task and low-relationship management at the performing stage of group development.

This model of leadership is suitable for more experienced teachers as certain management techniques (focus on task or on relationship) must be adjusted to a given phase of group development. It means that the teacher should be able to analyze group processes in the first place and then choose appropriate facilitation techniques.

The way to group cohesiveness may also lead through transactional and transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994):

> Transactional leadership means that the teacher sets goals and clarifies the sense of duty in a group while transformational leadership is followed by teachers who provide vision and inspiration to the students by changing learners' expectations and their perception of the learning process. (Gałajda, 2012a, p. 94)

In the context of a language classroom, transactional leadership is quite obvious as it sets the norms and rules so that the learners know how to achieve group and individual goals. However, as in all types of theoretical models, effective leadership requires the combination of both transactional approach and one focused more on motivation, commitment to the group and emotions of individuals. Creating and maintaining the cohesive classroom with a positive climate requires an inspirational teacher who will encourage the students not only to learn a language but also invest their time and effort in group life. Owing to transformational leadership, students learn that it is worth trying to identify with the group and enhance relations with other group members. The teacher sets the example by taking interest in individual problems and concerns of the learners. As a consequence, students feel safe in classes led by transformational leaders and they are more willing to create cohesive learning groups.

Choosing the right model of facilitation is not easy as the teacher should be able to look for management techniques suitable for their attitude towards the teaching process and the learning group. All types of leadership accompanied with appropriate modes of facilitation help to create and maintain group cohesiveness. What is important and most difficult, especially for novice teachers, is the ability to analyze and diagnose what happens inside the group and act accordingly.

6. Managing group conflicts

While it is quite obvious that group cohesiveness depends on whether groups are task- and process-oriented, interactive and charismatic (Heron, 2006), the

question is to what extent negative forms of group dynamics influence group cohesiveness. Conflicts exist in every kind of social group and they can be defined as:

> disagreement, discord, and friction that occur when the actions or beliefs of one or more members of the group are unacceptable to and resisted by one or more of the other group members. (Forsyth, 2009, p. 380)

Forsyth states that the course of conflicts in groups has its roots in the routine of group interaction, next the conflict grows stronger and finally it is resolved after a shorter or longer period of time. The characteristics of the conflict depend on its roots, one of them being competition. People in groups are interdependent and usually they know that they have to cooperate in order to achieve their goals. However, sometimes there is only one person or a subgroup which can win, which means that the others will lose. Forsyth describes the study by Deutsch (1949, as cited in Forsyth, 2009), who created two grading systems in college classes: one was based on cooperation and the other on competition. The number of conflicts in the second group was obviously higher. Treating group work as competition can lead to a so-called social trap where too many individuals focus on personal goals instead of collaborative, usually long-term goals. Some of such group members will be even more greedy and they will try to gain more authority than others. The conflict over power and control of what happens in the group can result in task conflict. Consequently, it can affect the outcome of group process, which in the case of foreign language classroom is the learning process itself.

Looking at the most popular causes of group conflict in language classroom Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) enumerate personality conflicts, problematic students, and communication difficulties. Relationship conflicts are usually present in a group at the beginning of group life when group members have negative feelings about other people in the group. Poor communication between the learners can also lead to a conflict and ruin group cohesiveness. In order to avoid such conflicts teachers should create a positive atmosphere in which learners can quickly solve misunderstandings themselves, as teacher's involvement is unnecessary. Student conflicts connected with tasks that they are supposed to perform are very often caused by apathy, boredom, or lack of motivation. Students can also have problems with proper understanding of the task, their role in completing the task, time limit set by the teacher, etc. Also, some conflicts arise only at a given stage of group development and they disappear with time when the group becomes more cohesive. That is the reason why it is sometimes advisable for the teacher to trust the students since a majority of students' conflicts is short-lived (Jones & Jones, 2000) and does not require the teacher's intervention. Nevertheless, teacher's facilitation techniques should be adjusted to the stage of

group development and students should always have the opportunity to express their emotions and have open discussion with their peers and the teacher. It will help students to handle their emotions (Forsyth, 2009), to develop the ability of active listening (Bolstad & Hamblett, 2007) and understanding (Levi, 2010). Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) also stress the importance of students' reflectivity (for example in the form of a log) as a way of dealing with group conflicts and creating group cohesiveness:

> It entails students evaluating the classroom events and reflecting on the usefulness and appropriateness of the activities they have been doing in class in a notebook. The teacher reads the logs weekly, getting feedback on what students liked and what they thought helped them to learn. […] By writing logs, students can review what they have done and feel more involved in the course as they have ongoing communication with the teacher and thus influence the course. Similarly, the action log entries might reveal potential problems and conflicts, helping the teacher to address them in time. (2003, pp. 139–140)

In this way, students get a common goal, and thus the teacher promotes group productivity, which might help to avoid apathy and lack of motivation (Dörnyei, 2001).

In their discussion of trouble-shooting in a group, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) give the example of research conducted by Sherif (1966, as cited in Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) in which two highly cohesive groups of students were given a common, superordinate goal in order to reduce the hostility between the students. As the research results suggest, creating a task which can be completed only when every single student is involved can be a way of managing the conflict and working on group cohesiveness. This study also suggests and supports, what Wilson (2002, as cited in Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) claims about the positive effect of group conflicts on group life. Conflicts might help the teachers to create cohesive groups by actually improving the relationship between the students. Groups which encounter occasional conflicts might also be more productive as the students have the opportunity for more heated debates. Conflicts are also a good occasion to relieve the tension present between group members and serve as an "outlet for hostility" (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, p. 142). Generally, conflicts which are resolved by an open discussion facilitated by the teacher can help to involve all students and consequently to make the group members more devoted to what happens inside the classroom.

Levi (2010, p. 116) believes that "healthy conflicts" are an inseparable part of group life and they should be treated naturally by the teacher. By "healthy conflicts" Levi understands the situation in which group members present different opinions and perspectives about the common task and have differ-

ent expectations. On the other hand, unhealthy conflicts between aim of the group and of the individuals, unhealthy competition and lack of communication between group members can result in problems with group cohesiveness and negative attitude towards group work. Levi (2010) believes that such conflicts, unless they are solved with the teacher's help, might destroy learners' relationships, their positive attitude towards the group and learning process, distract students' attention from the task and group goals, as well as result in students' permanent stress and lack of interest in group life. Teachers can decide how they can react to the problem (2010). They can avoid the conflict and leave it to the students. It can be a good solution when the problem is short-lived and it can be resolved by the students themselves. In emergency situations, it is advisable to confront the problem and suggest a solution to the students. Teachers can also show the students how to accommodate in a given situation and look for a compromise. Finally, the whole group together with the teacher can look for a solution together collaboratively, which seems to be the best option as it involves all group members and the group leader, and helps to create group cohesiveness.

7. Conclusions

The chapter has highlighted the most important aspects of group cohesiveness in the context of a language classroom. Additionally, major factors like the stages of group development, teacher's facilitation and management techniques, as well as ways of trouble-shooting have been presented and their influence on group cohesiveness has been discussed.

Taking into consideration the available research data (Jaques, 2000; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Forsyth, 2009; Levi, 2010; Gałajda, 2012) it can be stated that creating a positive classroom climate is possible and worth trying since cohesive groups are much more successful and productive. In other words, group cohesiveness should be the ultimate goal of facilitation, as by trying to enhance group processes teachers are able to create effective learning groups. In general, the research on facilitating group processes is developing very fast, however, not in the context of a language classroom. For a few reasons, it is still quite difficult to persuade teachers to at least try to facilitate the groups they teach. First of all, language teachers are not aware of the fact that language classrooms behave as any other social groups with their structures and intergroup relations. Because of that they treat language classes only as groups of individuals instead of integrated units. Secondly, teachers lack knowledge of basic facilitation techniques and ways of dealing with conflicts and other problems which

might occur during all stages of group life. As a consequence, they do not pay attention to certain stages of group life and the influence they have on individual learners and the learning process. Finally, it seems that the majority of teachers are not very convinced that creating cohesive groups is important or necessary. Usually, they do not realize that the positive climate they create in a group is only superficial, because group cohesiveness is something more than laughing students and a friendly teacher. Thus, if language teachers are to become successful facilitators, they need to be more interested in inter-member relations of the learning groups they teach. Only through reflection and active observation of the group accompanied by theoretical background can they facilitate group processes, enhance the dynamics of their groups and, consequently, achieve stable group cohesiveness.

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Group cohesiveness

Dagmara Gałajda

Spójność grupy

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest omówienie pojęcia spójności grupy (ang. *group cohesiveness*) w kontekście klasy językowej. Artykuł skupia się w głównej mierze na tym, jak ważne w tworzeniu pozytywnej atmosfery panującej w klasie językowej są poszczególne etapy rozwoju grupy. W rozdziale omówiono nie tylko modele rozwoju grupy (Tuckman i Jansen, 1977; Dörnyei i Herman, 1998), ale również techniki rozwijania procesów grupowych (ang. *group facilitation techniques*) (Hadfield, 1992; Jaques, 2000; Levi, 2010; Haynes, 2012) dostosowane do kontekstu klasy językowej. W kolejnej części artykułu omówiono rolę nauczyciela jako lidera w procesie tworzenia spójnej grupy. Dalsza część artykułu skupia się na omówieniu potencjalnych konfliktów, jakie mogą wystąpić w klasie językowej oraz ich negatywnego wpływu na spójność grupy. Artykuł kończą wskazówki i sugestie dla nauczyciela dotyczące rozwijania efektywnej dynamiki grupy w procesie kształcenia językowego.

Dagmara Gałajda

Die Geschlossenheit der Gruppe

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel des Beitrags ist, den Begriff „Gruppengeschlossenheit" (eng.: *group cohesiveness*) im Kontext einer Sprachklasse zu erläutern. Er konzentriert sich vor allem darauf, die Bedeutung von den einzelnen Stufen der Gruppenentwicklung bei Erschaffung der positiven Atmosphäre in einer Sprachklasse hervorzuheben. Die Verfasserin bespricht nicht nur die Modelle der Gruppenentwicklung (Tuckman u. Jensen, 1977; und Dörnyei u. Ehrman 1998), sondern auch verschiedene Entwicklungstechniken von den dem Kontext einer Sprachklasse angepassten Gruppenprozessen (eng.: *group facilitation techniques*) (Hadfield, 1992; Jacques, 2000; Levi, 2010; Haynes, 2012). Im weiteren Teil des Beitrags behandelt man die Rolle des Lehrers als eines Leaders bei Erschaffung einer geschlossenen Gruppe. Dann konzentriert sich die Verfasserin darauf, die potentiellen Konflikte in einer Sprachklasse und deren negativen Einfluss auf die Geschlossenheit der Gruppe zu erörtern. Am Ende befinden sich Hinweise für Lehrer, wie eine effektive Dynamik der Gruppe im Prozess der Spracherlernung zu entwickeln ist.